

## **The Associated Press – Tuesday, 1-15-08**

### **A Just-for-Boys Ballet Class Teaches Discipline and Grace**

By Associated Press

SANTA FE – An out-of-breath Stewart Ottersberg showed up late to ballet class Friday. He was wearing jeans and sneakers.

Stewart, a jovial and eager 12-year-old, didn't realize he was breaking important rules.

"Jeans, are you kidding me?" his instructor, Jefferson Baum, said to the whole class on seeing his attire.

It was Ballet Boot Camp, a place for boys only, where black sweatpants, white shirts and dance shoes were required.

The boys must aspire to wear black tights. They must never talk during class. There are no bathroom breaks. Ten minutes early is on time; on time is late. Baum's nine ballet students, in the third, fourth, fifth and sixth grades, didn't quite know what they were getting into.

"These rooms are soundproof, so they won't hear you scream," Baum said at the beginning of class. He then led the boys through a series of push ups and crunches. He demanded perfect form.

The classes wouldn't get much better for Stewart. Pliés and pirouettes proved to be much more difficult than he thought.

Jumping, turning and pointing one's toes is much harder in sneakers and jeans, he realized. Stewart fell several times while trying to gracefully jump and turn, but he was concentrating so hard that he earned encouragement from Baum, who said everyone falls.

"I thought it was going to be easy because I just see the girls always going la la," Stewart said.

Twenty-three boys have signed up for Ballet Boot Camp, in its first year at the National Dance Institute. Classes started Friday for grades three to six; the class for seventh, eighth and ninth grades started Saturday.

Baum came up with the marketing slogan himself, which is meant to dispel stereotypes about ballet. The posters and shirts for the class read, "Hey, even Superman wore tights."

Baum's ballet class is intended to build the boys' upper body strength and increase their flexibility and grace. And what is more important, it will teach them discipline, he says.

Baum, a tall, thin man, began dancing when he was 14 years old. Back then, his high school classmates called him “Twinkle Toes.”

Even though he was teased, he is fond of saying he ended up the lucky one because he was in a ballet class with 30 beautiful women and two gay men. Baum says people’s perceptions about boys in ballet are slowly changing and he hopes to help the process along.

“I think there’s still a little bit of machismo out there,” he said. “That’s one of the missions of this class: to shatter that idea that this is something girls do.”

Noah Caulfield, a lanky 11-year-old, said he figures girls will tease him instead of going out with him because he’s taking ballet. He said he got roped into the class because his sister is studying dance.

“Since my sister does ballet, my mom thought it would be a good idea,” he said.